

**Kingsbridge Rural District**  
**. . Council. . .**

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**. REPORT .**

**OF THE**

**MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH**

**FOR THE YEAR 1908.**



# Kingsbridge Rural District Council.

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## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1908.

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GENTLEMEN,—

I have the honour to present to you my fifteenth annual report dealing with the matters affecting the Public Health in your district.

### PHYSICAL FEATURES AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

The country is hilly, and comprises a large number of small villages and hamlets, the inhabitants of which are mainly engaged in agricultural pursuits, there being no other industries whatever. The population is sparse and relatively poor, wages are low, and many of the young men are drawn from the district to serve in the navy or army, or find more remunerative employment elsewhere. As a consequence, those who are considered to be physically unfit for either of the services, being left in the district, magnify the ordinary proportion of young people of mental or bodily ill-health, and this perhaps may account for that high rate of poor-law relief and poor-law medical relief to which attention has so often been called by one of the inspectors of the Local Government Board.

### HOUSE ACCOMMODATION: ADEQUACY AND FITNESS.

The house accommodation in the district may be considered fairly satisfactory: in some few instances I have found that the sleeping apartments do not provide what is generally considered an adequate amount of cubic air space, but it must be borne in mind that this is generally compensated by the out-door occupation of the occupants, and that the apartments are only occupied for a

short period of the twenty-four hours. Most of the cottages and smaller farm houses have their ground floors paved on the soil itself, and this exaggerates the dampness inherent in the climate.

As a rule the air space surrounding the dwellings is sufficient, but the houses being mostly old, the windows are small, ill-placed, and not made to open efficiently ; and consequently natural ventilation is curtailed. The bedroom windows are seldom made to open top and bottom, and those rooms which are provided with fire places generally have the chimneys bricked in or otherwise occluded. New cottages are gradually being erected in the district, and where such is the case modern requirements are being complied with, and as a consequence there is a gradual diminution of unsatisfactory dwellings for labourers, and a better provision for their health and comfort.

During the year under consideration I have strongly recommended the adoption of building bye-laws, and after much discussion and consideration I am glad to be able to report that before another year's sanitary work has to be commented upon, such bye-laws will have been adopted and be in force.

### WATER SUPPLY.

The district as a whole is well supplied with potable water, most of the villages having a system derived from neighbouring springs or wells. Isolated houses or cottages mainly depend for their supply on wells. For its numerical importance, Aveton Gifford is at present the most inconveniently supplied, as there is no pipe-distribution in the village, a proportion of the houses obtaining their water from private wells, but the majority having to carry it a considerable distance from one public well situated in the middle of the village. Considering the size of this village, with several hundred inhabitants, I am of opinion that the question of obtaining for it an adequate supply of pure water is one that should as soon as possible again engage the attention of your authority.

**Kingston.**—The better distribution of the water supply of this village has from time to time been brought to your notice. I have attended various committee meetings of the Parish Council, together with certain members of the R.D. Council, but am sorry

to say that no satisfactory scheme has been adopted to remedy the defects which I still consider exist.

**Stokefleming.**—The foregoing remarks with regard to Kingston apply to this important village. In both instances there is an abundance of pure water, but the majority of the villagers labour under the serious disadvantage of having to carry it quite an unreasonable distance to their dwellings.

I have analysed eight samples of water from various sources in the district during the year, 5 of which proved to be pure and of good quality, the remaining 3 I condemned as impure and unfit for domestic use.

### MILK SUPPLY.

The milk supply of the district is provided by the various farmers dwelling in the locality. As far as I am aware no samples of milk have been ordered to be analysed during the year. The regulations of the Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops Order are generally complied with. The inspection of these devolves upon the M.O.H.

### FOODS.

I am unaware that any samples of foods, &c., have been subjected to analysis by your authority; whether the police have taken any action in this matter, I have not been informed. Your Sanitary Officers have not been empowered to take any action.

### SEWAGE AND DRAINAGE.

Nearly all cottages and groups of cottages have a system of privy-middens or dry earth closets: most of the villages are provided with a water-borne sewage system, and the dwellings within the statutory distance are connected thereto. Many of these sewers have their outfall in contiguous water-courses, and in some instances in estuaries or foreshores.

**Sherford.**—In July I met the Parish Council, together with several members of the R.D. Council, to consider the advisability of providing a sewer for a certain portion of this village. I recommended the same to be provided owing to an outbreak of typhoid fever; after due consideration, and upon the recommendation of the Parish Council, your authority decided to take no action in the matter. I am still of opinion that the portion of the village under consideration requires to be properly sewered.

**Stockwell**, West Alvington.—Stockwell Cottages—The slop drains to these cottages have been re-constructed and perfected, and a sewer has been constructed for the various dwellings in the "Lower Town."

**Slapton**.—Rag Lane—Several cottages in this lane have been more efficiently connected with the sewer.

**Torcross**.—A Cesspit in connection with various cottages belonging to Mrs. Knight has been improved and rendered effective.

The provision of a better sewage scheme for Modbury is still undecided. Reference to this question has been made twice previously in my annual reports. Owing to various conflicting interests this important matter has been allowed to stand over from time to time. I consider the delay may be prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants sooner or later.

### POLLUTION OF RIVERS AND STREAMS.

There is to my knowledge no evident pollution of the rivers and streams in this district such as would affect the general health of the population.

### REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF HOUSE REFUSE.

All cottages and isolated houses, together with those in villages, dispose of their house refuse by means of pits, generally covered and often connected with their privies; and eventually use the same for their gardens or farms. The town of Modbury alone possesses a public scavenger, who collects and removes the refuse at stated intervals.

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The means at our disposal of dealing with infectious diseases consists in compulsory notification, and as a sequence, the domestic isolation of the cases and disinfection of the premises so far as circumstances permit. We at present have no isolation or infectious disease hospital, and I am sorry to say that measles and whooping-cough are not scheduled by your authority as notifiable.

During the year I have received 25 notifications of cases of infectious disease occurring in your district, as compared with 24 in 1907, 43 in 1906, and 77 in 1905.

Diphtheria 4, the same number as last year; Erysipelas 2, as against 8 last year; Scarlet Fever 15, as against 3 last year; Enteric Fever 4, as against 9 last year.

## DIPHThERIA.

Of the four cases of this disease, three occurred in the same family at Stockwell, West Alvington, and one at Slapton. One case proved fatal in a child aged 7 years at Stockwell, West Alvington.

## ERYSIPELAS.

Only two cases of this disease are recorded during the year, one at Modbury and one at Churchstow. Neither of them were in my opinion due to local insanitary conditions.

## SCARLET FEVER.

There has been a large increase in the number of cases of this disease notified during the year, 15 cases having occurred, as against only three in 1907. The cases were distributed throughout the district as follows:—Modbury, 1; Goveton, 2; Chillington, 1; Loddiswell, 2; Topsham Bridge, 1; Yanston, 2; Frogmore, 1; Kingston, 2; Bantham, 1; West Buckland, 2.

The whole of the cases were of a mild type, and in no instance proved fatal.

I attribute the large increase to be due to the disease being spread amongst schoolmates by children suffering before detection of the malady. Prompt measures were adopted to check this.

With regard to the infectious diseases not scheduled as notifiable, viz.:—Measles, Mumps, and Whooping Cough, no serious outbreak of these diseases occurred, though one case of Measles in a child aged 21 months at Blackawton proved fatal.

## ENTERIC FEVER.

It is extremely gratifying to note the decrease in the number of cases of this disease, 4 cases only having occurred as against 9 last year. Of the 4 cases notified, one occurred at Modbury, one at Kingston, one at Chillington, and one at Bigbury Bungalows. The cases were all of a mild type, and none of them proved fatal. As you are aware all the cases were reported upon at the time of their outbreak, and immediate action taken.

## SCHCOLS.

I found it necessary to close the Thurstlestone Schools a few days earlier than the date fixed for the summer vacation, owing to a slight outbreak of Whooping Cough amongst the scholars. This is



the only instance of the closing of schools in the district during the year.

### OVERCROWDING.

I have not found it necessary to report any cases of overcrowding during the past year, but with regard to house letting, lodgings, &c., your authority has not adopted any bye-laws, the same being only controlled by the provisions of the Public Health Act, 1875.

### VITAL STATISTICS.

During the year there have been registered 156 deaths at all ages from all causes, giving an annual death rate of 13·7 per thousand of population. For the same period 239 births have been registered, giving a birth rate of 21 per thousand of population.

There have been registered 3 deaths from the principal Zymotic Diseases, viz.:—Measles, 1; Diphtheria, 1; Diarrhœa, 1 (under 1 year).

The Zymotic Death Rate is ·26 per thousand of population; in 1907 it was ·43, and in 1906 ·61.

The deaths registered under one year number 22, seven of which were premature children who died shortly after birth.

The deaths under one year as a percentage of total deaths is 14·1, last year it was 12·1, and in 1906 it was 16·2.

The deaths under 5 years as a percentage of total deaths is ·64, last year it was 5·1.

The deaths under one year as a percentage of registered births is 9·1.

The Birth Rate, 21, is about the average for the last 10 years.

Of the 25 deaths in the Blackawton District, 5 occurred over the age of 70 years and 3 over 80 years, the oldest being 84 years.

Of the 22 deaths in the Kingsbridge Rural District, two were over 70 years, and seven over 80 years, and one 90 years of age.

Of the 46 deaths in Modbury District eleven occurred at ages over 70 years and seven at ages over 80 years, the oldest being 88 years.

Of the 36 deaths in Stokenham District eleven occurred at ages over 70 years, three over 80 years and one over 90 years.

Of the 27 deaths in the West Alvington District one occurred at the age of 78 years and eight at ages over 80 years; the oldest



being 89 years. Summarising these figures we find that of the total 156 deaths, one-third exceeded the age of 70 years and nearly the half of these were considerably over 80 years.

The Death Rate in the various registration districts for the last 10 years is shewn hereunder as a comparative table. The figures indicate the ratio per thousand of population.

			Black- awton.	Kings- bridge.	Mod- bury.	Stoken- ham.	West Alvington.
1899	..	..	16·8	9·9	14·2	11·9	13·9
1900	..	..	14·7	12·9	17·9	14·04	16·3
1901	..	..	13·0	8·9	16·2	14·6	13·9
1902	..	..	13·0	10·5	14·8	19·9	11·8
1903	..	..	17·4	7·4	11·9	12·7	18·8
1904	..	..	13·0	11·3	9·9	19·5	16·6
1905	..	..	12·1	13·8	11·5	16·1	12·8
1906	..	..	12·6	11·3	14·8	14·2	11·7
1907	..	..	14·05	11·3	16·6	16·1	12·3
1908	..	..	12·1	10·4	16·6	13·5	14·5

*A shipwreck occurring in the West Alvington District, by which 7 lives were lost, accounts for the increased death rate in that district.*

The distribution of the various diseases and causes of death in the foregoing tables suggest no grounds for special comment, as they show no particular incidence in any single district.

### INFLUENZA.

There were no deaths registered as being directly attributable to this disease.

### PULMONARY TUBERCULOSIS.

There were eight deaths registered from this disease, one occurring in Blackawton District; one in Kingsbridge R.D.; three in Modbury; two in Stokenham; and one in West Alvington District. This represents a death rate of ·70 per 1,000 of population, which is below the average for this district.

### CANCER.

Malignant Disease has accounted for 19 deaths again this year, which is the same number as last year.

### VIOLENCE.

Three deaths are registered under this heading; two being cases of suicide, and one caused by the accidental overlaying of an infant.

## ACCIDENTAL DROWNING.

Eight deaths have been registered as due to accidental drowning ; seven were caused by the stranding of a sailing ship, and one by the capsizing of a fishing boat, the former in West Alvington District and the latter in Stokenham District.

## DAIRIES, COWSHEDS AND MILKSHOPS ORDER.

I have made numerous inspections, and have found nothing requiring special comment or report. The various defects, &c., which I have discovered have always been promptly remedied in accordance with my suggestions.

## OPERATION OF THE FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS ACT, 1901.

Under Section 132 of this Act it is my duty as Medical Officer of Health to your Council to report as follows :—I have personally from time to time inspected various workshops and work-places in the district (there are no factories), and as regards (a) general cleanliness, (b) air space, (c) ventilation, and (e) provision of suitable sanitary arrangements, have found them generally satisfactory. (d) “Trades involving wet processes”—the only “offensive trade” carried on in the district is that of a fell-monger, the premises of which I have frequently inspected and found satisfactory.

Appended herewith is the table provided by request of the Secretary of State, showing the number of inspections of workshops and work-places made during the year, the number of defects found as regards nuisances under the Public Health Acts and offences against the Factories and Workshops Act, and other matters. Along with these are also the tabular statements required by the Local Government Board, the contents of which I have furnished to the extent of the information in my possession.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

**WILLIAM HY. WEBB,**

Medical Officer of Health.

*The Kingsbridge Rural Council.*